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SECTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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DOCTOR CHARLES WAGLEY, Columbia University: ***The Effects of Depopulation upon Social Organization as Illustrated by the Tapirape Indians.***

121 In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the general processes of culture change resulting from contacts between European and native peoples. Such studies are part of the study of "acculturation," a term recently defined by Professors Linton, Redfield, and Herskovits: "The crux of the definition lies in the phrase, 'Those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact.'"[1] This period of continuous first-hand contact historically follows upon a period of sporadic contact between the native peoples and some few Europeans (fur traders, explorers, missionaries, and even occasional single settlers), which in a sense has prepared the ground for a more intense influence of European culture when relations between the two peoples have become continuous. Few ethnologists have witnessed this period of sporadic contact and histories have little to tell us of it. But during this period, borrowing of European material culture generally occurs. Often the value system of the native culture is shifted, as objects having minor value take on major value for purposes of trade. Of great importance is the introduction of foreign disease, which frequently wipes out large numbers, or even the major part of the native population.

105 The Tapirape Indians, among whom the author lived for more than a year,[2] are a Tupi speaking people living between the Araguaya and Xingu Rivers of Central Brasil near an affluent of the Araguaya which bears their name. They are a forest people and their village lies some fifty miles back from the

[1] Linton, Ralph: *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes*, p. 464.

[2] This research extended from January 1939 to June 1940, and was made possible by a grant from the Social Science Research Council, Columbia University.

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Tapirapé River. They have had only sporadic contact with Europeans. About 1909, the first Brazilians visited them in their village, and, each July or August since 1914, the Dominican priests meet them at a port on the Tapirapé River and bring them presents—axes, hoes, salt, etc. Between 1930 and 1935, a Scotch Protestant missionary made three trips to the village, staying there two to three months at a stretch. During the dry season, the Tapirapé regularly go down to the river for fishing and collecting turtle eggs and to wait in hope that the Dominican priests will come with a new supply of presents. There they sometimes meet trappers and hunters, and occasionally a Brazilian hunter will make the long trip to their village as an adventure, or—rarely— a Tapirapé will go back with a missionary or hunter to the Araguaya—some 200 miles away—and return to the village loaded with presents and tall stories. These few contacts, the only ones which these people have had with Europeans, have nevertheless affected the Tapirapé culture profoundly and in many ways. For lack of time, however, I shall describe only the effects resulting from the introduction of foreign diseases, which even antedated European contact, and the consequent wiping out of the great part of the Tapirapé population.

In the memory of one Tapirapé informant, there were five villages (about 1890), each of which must have contained well over two hundred people. The introduction of smallpox about 1895[3] caused one village to disband, since most of the inhabitants had died. About 1900, another European disease, probably influenza, caused a second village to break up through loss of people. Yellow fever must have taken its toll among the Tapirapé at various times, as it did among the neighboring Caraja Indians, and, in 1920, the world-wide influenza epidemic came belatedly to the Araguaya and on to the Tapirapé. In 1932, the survivors of a third village, depopulated by disease, joined the most southern village, Tampitawa, and, during my residence there in 1939, the survivors of a fourth village joined us. As a result of this wholesale depopulation from disease, there remained only one village

[3] Probably through the Caraja.

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and only 147 inhabitants. This is an extraordinary example of the ravages of European diseases among a native American people.

Tampitawa (Village of the Tapir) is composed, therefore, of a residue from all of the five original villages. All of the customs and ceremony attached to inter-village relations have of course disappeared. People remember their former village affiliation, or that of their parents. They still speak of a person as being "the son of Fish Village," but village loyalty, once strong, has disappeared. Formerly, villages were basically endogamous, but some marriage outside of the village did take place. Today, only three people can say that they are descendants of people from Tapir Village. Ancient inter-village antagonism existed, especially between Tapir and the village which joined with it in 1900. Today, this conflict is only remembered under the stress of some quarrel and is referred to only as a taunt.

Depopulation has had little effect on the economic life of the Tapirapé. They are basically a forest agricultural people with large plantations. Manioc is their staple. Plantations are large enough, and the economic organization fluid enough, to allow for the support of large numbers of refugees for a year or so until they can make gardens for themselves. Refugees have joined one of the large households, at present eight, each with some twenty-five to thirty people. Formerly these households were matrilineal groups headed by a man of high prestige. His wife's relatives formed the matrilineal group and he demanded labor from his numerous sons-in-law (husbands of daughters of wife, including extended "daughters"). The coming of refugees disrupted these matrilocal households. If a refugee woman lacked a close female kin, her husband often arranged for habitation with a friend or a relative of his. Men of high status offered the hospitality of their houses to incoming men of rank. Today, therefore, many reassortments of relatives live under one roof, and two and even three separate groups of female relatives live under as many older men, whereas formerly they would have formed one household under the leadership of one household head. In no one case, does a man control a complete household as he would have done under the old system.

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The men's moieties form the basis for Tapirape ceremonial and for cooperative gardening and hunting. Each moiety is divided into three age grades. Thus, in the village, there are two groups of "boys" and "youths" (up to sixteen years of age), two of mature men or "warriors" (up to approximately 45), and two groups of "older men." Really old and inactive men give up moiety activity and have no affiliation. A boy belongs automatically to the moiety of his father and formerly he progressed through the three age grades of that moiety. All ceremonies involve the moiety age grades, which dance against each other, race against each other, and give reciprocal feast exchanges. Cooperative hunts and clearing of the forest likewise involve reciprocal activities. However, with the great loss of population, and especially a loss of men of the oldest age group, this organization was thrown out of balance. In order to continue ceremonial life, several youths, who were spoken of as "lazy" and who were not capable hunters or workers, passed into the "older men's" age groups, in which there is little active cooperative hunting and gardening, in order to give those groups sufficient numbers for ceremonial activity. This rapid passing from boys' age grade to that of older men has influenced native thought in two ways:— First, young men are losing the idea of automatic progression through the three age grades, and there is a tendency now to think that the better young men become "warriors," while less capable ones pass rapidly to the older men's group. Second, the older men's age grades, formerly the groups of highest prestige, tend to be looked on with little favor, and only those individuals are thought of with respect who have status for other reasons.

Depopulation has also affected the second Tapirape social grouping—the feast groups. These are made up of all men and women. They are matrilocal for women and patrilocal for men. These feast groups meet periodically during the dry season for ceremonial meals. At present, three of the original ten feast groups have disappeared because of lack of members.

Chieftainship has changed under the influence of both depopulation and the sporadic contacts with Brazilians. All men of

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ALL MEN OF
status are, today, called "capitaoes" (The Tapirape use the Portuguese word. There is no equivalent in their language.) These "capitaoes" are village elders (who were village "favorite children" in their youth, and therefore people of prestige), leaders of the warriors, age grades, and able shamans. Formerly, there were only two village elders, two warrior leaders, and, ideally, two favorite children in a village. Today, with congregation of people from all villages in one, several "noble" families are present and there is an oversupply of "capitaoes."

Marriage arrangements, too, have been affected by depopulation. At present, there are some ten men of marriageable age, for whom there are no possible wives, and immediate families are so broken up that there are no possible groups of women to care for those unattached men. A man must have a wife to cook for him and perform women's tasks. To do any woman's work would play complete havoc with a man's personal prestige, which is a matter of greatest importance. Most of these Tapirape men have solved their problem by contracting convenient "social" marriages with extremely young girls. They attach themselves to a household, in which they perform a man's customary economic duties, and, in turn, their mothers-in-law do women's work for them.

Lack of time prevents mention of many other aspects of native life pertaining to marriage, kinship, and leadership, which have been profoundly affected by depopulation. Possibly, in other cultures, the effects of introduced disease have not been quite so disastrous, nor the loss of people so important to the social life, as in the case of the Tapirape. Without a doubt, however, wherever there have been sporadic contacts with Europeans, these or other alien factors have been introduced and have caused important changes in the structure of native life.